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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt

Addendum

Mission to Sierra Leone: comments by the State on the report of the Special Rapporteur*

* Reproduced as received.

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1. The only major comments that we would like to make relates to traditional beliefs and practices. Contrary to the image portrayed in the report, there is no "traditional African religion" as such, practised in Sierra Leone. Everyone identifies with a religion, mainly Christianity and Islam, while at the same time having varying degrees of traditional beliefs and following certain traditional practices. Thus, the harmful traditional practices referred to in the report are prevalent among both Christians and Muslims, but are not done in the name of religion.

2. The above fact can be considered positive, in that it creates the avenue for public awareness and campaign against such practices. Thus, for instance, a national consultative forum of Traditional and Religious leaders on maternal mortality and morbidity reduction in Sierra Leone has held two conferences on the subject. Organized by the Office of the First Lady in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) the forum aims to accelerate a reduction of maternal mortality in Sierra Leone, with the assistance of the religious and traditional leaders.

3. As in any country in which unexplained tragedies, such as child deaths are prevalent, there is a belief in an evil power – witchcraft. History has shown that with education and improved health and low mortality, this belief in witchcraft disappears.

4. As regards female genital cutting, the Government has worked very closely with the UN family agencies to ensure that a memorandum of understanding was signed with the 'Soweis"-the female traditional leaders who perform FGC-in order to maintain the legal age of eighteen below which it is currently illegal to perform such harmful practices. The Government will continue to support massive sensitization and awareness-raising on the ills of this issue.